

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

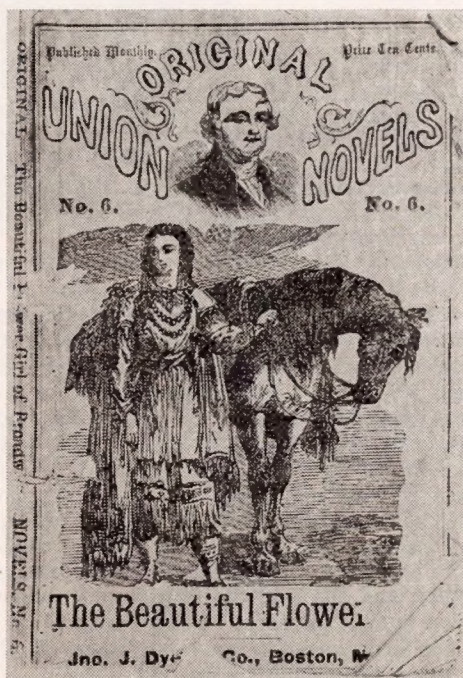
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Cap'n Wiley: Maine's Merry Munchausen

By Frank C. Acker



DIME NOVEL SKETCHES NO. 166

ORIGINAL UNION NOVELS

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 Issues: 6 (highest number seen). Schedule of Issue: Monthly. Dates: Undated (probably 1865). Size: 6½x4¼". Pages: 100. Price: 10c. Illustrations: Line drawing on yellow covers. Contents: Only issue seen or advertised is pictured above. Full title is *Flora, the Beautiful Flower Girl of Broadway. A Tale of New York City*, by Miss Amelia Montague. (I suspect that this series is Chaney's Union Novels with a changed series title). From the Ralph F. Cummings collection.

Cap'n Wiley: Maine's Merry Munchausen

By Frank C. Acker

Two generations of American youth have savored the tang of Maine through the prolific pen of Gilbert Patten.

This State of Maine author, who exerted enormous impact on the values and mores of countless readers of his super-hero Frank Merriwell, was not content merely to set some of the thousand weekly Merriwell tales on the lakes and in the woods of Maine. He also borrowed from life his good friend, salty Maine sea captain Walter S. Wiley, and wove him into his stories without so much as a change of name.

The real Wiley's downeast fame at the turn of the century was considerable. It sprang from two accomplishments: his flair for tall tales that Munchausen would have envied, and his prowess as a baseball pitcher. Patten—or Burt L. Standish as he was known by pen name to American youth—endowed his fictional Wiley with these same traits and through them lifted and lightened the dream world of turn-of-the-century Young America.

Chickens born with wooden legs? Anti-frigidity pills for hens? Trained frog orchestra? These were but minor marvels attested by Cap'n Wiley, who modestly identified himself as deep sea wizard and master mariner. One wonders whether this real Wiley could have understood how great the numbers of readers he reached, whether he could have appreciated that it was not just in his beloved Camden, Maine, but all across the nation that boys and girls lined up each week at the corner store, nickel in hand, to buy the latest issue of the Merriwell saga in dime novel format. Certainly, he could not have known that total sales of the Merriwells were to reach half a billion, and that no reliable measure of actual readership would ever be made because of the widespread borrowing, bartering and exchange of the dime novels.

The fictional Wiley and the real-life captain did differ in one respect. The former is recorded in full panoply . . . his breezy style, outlandish tales, and pitching skill. But little indeed is on record about the life of the latter. Dime novel buffs, curious about him, must rely chiefly on this account in *Happy Hours Magazine*, September 1928 by the late William M. Burns:

"On the Atlantic highway lying between the town of Camden and the



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city of Rockland lies the little village of Rockport. It was here that Cap'n Wiley made his home for many years. He was captain of a coasting vessel which carried lime from Rockland and Rockport to Boston and New York.

"Cap'n Wiley was famous in this section for his tall stories. Mr. Patten did not stretch them a bit when he retold them in the Merriwell stories. He was also a ball player of no mean ability, and played many a game on the Rockland and Camden teams. He still has many friends in this section who remember him well. He was a personal friend of Mr. Patten as long as he lived."

It was in 1901 that Gil Patten hinted to his readers that a fellow named Cap'n Wiley might be entering their world . . . mentioning his pitching skill in a footnote in "Frank Merriwell's Bosom Friend" and identifying him as a Camden resident. But two years elapsed before Patten finally brought Wiley on stage. In "Dick Merriwell Surprised or Cap'n Wiley's Wind Jammers" the irrepressible sailor parachuted—literally—into the fictional world of the Merriwells.

The colorful front cover of this tale hints of the sea (Cap'n) and makes it clear that Wiley is a ball player to be reckoned with. He is shown in baseball uniform, short and wiry, pitching to a batter on the Merriwell team. The caption reads: "Cap'n Wiley suddenly twisted himself into a most astounding position, and delivered his famous 'contortion drop'."

Turning to page one, we find the Merriwell baseball team trouncing the locals at Red Eye, Colorado. Suddenly the action is interrupted. We read:

In the midst of this a huge white, umbrella-like object, from which dangled a dark figure, came sailing down through the air. It dropped rapidly, yet gently, and the dark, dangling figure struck the ground close beside the pitcher. It was a human being in checked golf trousers, a pink shirt, hatless, collarless, but cheerful and smiling.

If the reader needed further convincing that here indeed was a curious character, he quickly found it as the story went on. The paracutist, none other than Cap'n Wiley, expressed the simple thought that he'd like to pitch for the locals in these characteristic words:

" . . . as I sailed gracefully down through the ambient air, I observed with sorrow that they were lashing your curves to all quarters of the globe. The furious cracking of their bats as they biffed the ball came up to my ears like the rattle of musketry on a smoke-enveloped field of battle where a sanguine carnage was in full swing. It struck me as being quite the proper time to offer my services to break the monotony of this momentous occasion. If you will retire to the bench, I'll throw myself into the breach, deliver a few shoots and twists, and demonstrate to the gaping multitude just how easy it is to rupture a batting streak."

Despite this broadside, the Red Eye team refuses Wiley's offer to pitch and they are soundly trounced by the Merriwells. Nothing daunted by his snub, Wiley soon lays bare his innate modesty.

"My boy," said the marine marvel, "the complete story of my life would fill many ponderous volumes. If a historian were to attempt to truthfully narrate some of the hair-lifting adventures through which I have passed unscathed, his pen would become red-hot and melt in his grasp."

Later that same day Wiley regales a group assembled at the local hotel with his account of a shipwreck, and his subsequent swim of forty miles which

ended when he came upon a seven-masted schooner making heavy way, arriving just in time to save it from being cut in two by a crossing steamer. How did the Cap'n do this? By seizing the prow of the steamer and shoving her backwards seven miles into Boston Harbor!

Next day Wiley and his team of sailors, the Wind Jammers, demonstrated that he was not all bluff. They beat the Merriwell team 3 to 2, one of its few losses recorded in the Merriwell saga. The lineup of the Wind Jammers proved as salty as the marine marvel himself:

Bowline cf, Barnacle 2nd b, Cringle lf, Jackstay 1st b, Gudgeon rf, Fathom ss, Garboard 3rd b, Forestay c, Wiley p.

In all, after this overwhelming introduction to the Merriwell readers, Cap'n Wiley was involved in some fifty stories, marked throughout by tall tales in his rich and reckless vocabulary. Not all Wiley fantasies dealt with baseball or the sea. One, for example, described a broad jump contest which he won with an overkill jump of fifty feet, abruptly ended by smashing against the side of a building because he couldn't locate the "off" button of a small box in his pocket . . . his invention, the gravity destroyer.

His account of the famous echo "of Lost Gooseberry Hills, in the good old State of Maine," like all his tales, sang a light-hearted song. In Lost Gooseberry Hills, in a sylvan hollow known as Bald Bluff, Wiley when a mere lad made an interesting discovery about the echoes. "Mates," he said, "it may surprise you when I state that every night when I retired to my downy cot I used to stick my head out of the back window and well as loudly as possible, 'Time to get up!', and at precisely seven-fifteen the following morning the echo awoke me."

Among his Maine tales the nearly disastrous fishing episode on Lake Megunticook holds water with the best. On this occasion when he had set his lines in some thirty holes in the lake ice, the trout "came in herds, and schools, and regiments, and battalions, and they fought desperately among themselves for the delight of getting attached to my hooks and being lifted upon the ice." Finally the fish began climbing out upon the ice and Wiley realized with a shock that old Megunticook would be completely emptied of trout. Frantically he tried to push them back. But as he worked at one hole they'd climb out a dozen others. The stout Wiley heart faltered. Then suddenly, spying a pile of freshly cut cordwood, he called up his Yankee ingenuity. He grabbed an armful and soon had blocked every hole tight. So, Wiley concluded, "for a week after that the country for miles around dined upon Lake Megunticook trout, and as a Nimrod I am still known as the lalapaloosa of the Pine Tree State."

Reaction to Wiley's tall tales was generally sympathetic, but not always. Old Joe Crowfoot, Indian character in the Merriwell tales, named him "Wind-In-The-Head."

Despite this Indian reservation, the unpredictable Wiley, in his four strenuous years of dime novel life, won a lasting place in the Merriwell legend. In fact, with Dick and Frank Merriwell, he was one of a total of only six characters memorialized on postcards . . . now rare collector items . . . by the wily publishers, Street and Smith.

When his Wind Jammers team broke up, the Cap'n joined the Merriwells as pitcher and shortstop. His fantastic pitching and fielding were matched by a singular flair for derring-do. Completely loyal to the Merriwells, he saved them repeatedly from the dastardly plots of wrongdoers. But withal he was a nomad, carefree and unpredictable. He'd turn up from nowhere when desperately needed; but he might fail to appear for a critical game because of the call of adventure over the horizon.

Perhaps he was best characterized by Frank Merriwell who (in Tip Top #386) had just saved Wiley from being lynched for a murder he had not committed:

"Cap'n Wiley," said Frank, "you are to be envied. You hobnob with princes and emperors—in your mind. You seem to be perfectly happy in letting tomorrow care for itself. Somehow the good things of life come your way. You have great imagination and lively invention. If you do not lie yourself into jail, you may sometime die a natural death. But you are constantly taking chances. Beware!"

By one of life's ironies, the Wiley who won the hearts of so many boys and girls was not to die a natural death. But not because of his bent for wild tales or reckless courage in the face of odds. In Tip Top Weekly No. 584 ("Dick Merriwell Beset"), published June 22, 1907, Dick Merriwell is asked for Cap'n Wiley's Maine address. He replies:

"I am sorry to say that you will never have the pleasure of meeting Cap'n Wiley on this terrestrial sphere, as he would put it."

"Eh? How's that? What do you mean? He isn't dead, is he?"

"He is," was Merriwell's regretful answer. "He was killed near Augusta, Maine on the line of the Maine Central Railroad, this last spring, by being struck by an express train."

And so the Wiley of fiction and Wiley, the sailorman who loved Maine, closed their book of fantasy. For on the same page of the Tip Top we read this author's footnote:

"Walter Wiley, the original of the character known in Tip Top as 'Cap'n Wiley' was instantly killed in the manner described."

Like readers who refused to let Sherlock Holmes die, sorrowful Tip Top fans kept writing letters to the editor asking about Wiley, and when he would appear again. Patten never brought him back, but he did make one concession. He finally wrote a letter to the readers saying that he had come across the Captain's memoirs and they would be published. They were, in 1911 and again in 1914, under the title "The Wonderful Adventures of Cap'n Wiley." Filled with more of Wiley's incredible tales of adventure, his "biography" did not generate great interest, in part perhaps because it was not woven into the Merriwell stories themselves, in part because the grip of the Merriwells on young America was faltering.

Of all the characters in the Merriwell stories, Cap'n Wiley was author Patten's favorite. Even in his seventies, many years past his dime novel days, Patten told his friend, James Knott, that he would like to do a few more stories of Wiley. (Dime Novel Roundup, Sept. 15, 1956). But this was not to be. Patten died several years later, that one-more Wiley adventure untold.

It was not really needed. Cap'n Wiley had made his mark. He dramatized and reenforced the remarkable impact of Gil Patten on American youth. Taking care never to preach, Patten helped to direct his readers towards two goals. One was the Merriwell ideal of fair play and the no-smoke no-drink rule, not for morality, but for top performance in athletics. The other was the eradication of prejudice and intolerance simply by surrounding Merriwell with friends from diverse backgrounds and races who talked and reacted differently. Of all these Merry friends, Cap'n Wiley was certainly the most colorful and perhaps most memorable. American youth found him irresistible. In years to come social historians and plain folk alike may rediscover Wiley. Through him they too may sense the flavor of turn-of-the-century down east in a simpler and more innocent America.

The Elusives

by Jack Schorr

Some of the elusive books in my short-lived experience as a collector have been the Bert Wilson series, First Editions, with the gold letters and four illustrations and with black letters in second state. It has only been within the last year or so I have found any. The later editions with the cheaper bindings I have passed up. I still have a long way to go to complete series 1 and 2. I have only four.

Another series that is seldom seen is the Chadwick, College Sport series, C & L with gold letters and embossed covers. There was no trouble finding the reprints, which are in themselves attractive, but the first editions were something else. I finally found five of the six and still lack "Eight Oared Victors," but just the other day I got a line on that one.

The Jack Race series by Hale, published by Hearst International Library, has proved a real challenge to find. I finally have found two of these. They are good reading too.

The William Hawley sport stories are seldom seen on the West Coast. They were published by Appleton in the same format as some of the Barbour's with colored illustrated insert on the front cover. I have advertised extensively for these and with little response. I would classify them as scarce.

The Merriwells in maroon bindings have taken their place among the scarce ones within the last ten years. These I used to see, but no more. The tan ones are not obtained readily either.

The classic elusives are, "The White Ribbon Boys" series, "Don Kirk's Mine" by Patten, "Poppy Ott, Inferior Decorator," "Racer Boys," some of Winfield's like "Poor but Plucky." Most collectors have had difficulty in finding these even when juveniles were more plentiful. I'd hate to be starting now.

The Byron Dunn books, splendid stories of the Civil War, are difficult to find. Collectors of Civil War keep

picking them up when they find them. Often they are found in the adult section. Then there is "Logan the Mingo" by Gordon which appears on so many want lists.

When I hear collectors remark, "I would like better copies of Stratemeyer's 'Winning Hit' and 'The Island Camp' with Barnes as publisher," I am not in their league because I don't have them.

It's also been a number of years since I have found a good Dick Hamilton. These are not scarce, only hard to find when you need one. You can always find a copy of the good ones you have, but try to replace the worn copy.

Another will-o-the-wisp is "Cliff Stirling, Sophomore at Stormbridge." This is one of the real toughies to find regardless of condition.

"Rex Kingdom" by Braddock is another elusive, especially in the Hurst, and more especially if you only need one. Try and find "Lake Bennett's Hideout" and "Gilbert the Trapper" by Capt. C. R. Ashley, who is generally supposed to be Castlemon. Here I was lucky and found both at the same store. Have looked since for friends, but never a one.

I won't even mention "Boy Fortune Hunters" here except to say very scarce. I do have an extra "Boy Fortune Hunters in Egypt" waiting for a trade for Panama or Yucatan.

To the old timers this is old hat; to the newcomers it might be helpful to know what is hard to come by and you won't be trading it off for a Tom Slade like I did when I was getting started.

Sometimes even a book that all the other collectors have can be scarce if you don't have it. I have only covered a small portion of the "classic elusives." There are more, I am still looking.

FOR SALE

Set of 15 volumes O'Henry books, also set of 7 Mary R. Rinehart books, real reasonable.

Eli A. Messier

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TWO BOYS BOOKS WRITERS FROM WISCONSIN

By Marge Dahl

Leslie Quirk and Everett McNeil are not, and perhaps were not, the most widely read authors of books for boys. I was encouraged in my study of their work by Ralph Smith's comment that he remembered reading Leslie Quirk's stories, "... mostly of sport or college life." Yes, and a few about boy scouting. McNeil wrote historically based tales of the frontier and stories of adventure in the West.

Both wrote their own books, under their own names, and so far as I can discover made their living by writing. Both were bachelors throughout their lives, and the living was probably adequate. They are Wisconsin writers, having been raised and lived many years in Dane County. McNeil was older by twenty years, but his first published books appeared at the same time as Quirk's—about 1900-05. So far I've found only a few of their works and would certainly like to have all of them to fully study the use of Wisconsin backgrounds and events. McNeil's *THE LOST TREASURE CAVE* opens in a clubhouse on the Yahara River in Madison, Wis. Quirk's *Wellworth College* (in *THE THIRD STRIKE*) is without doubt the University of Wisconsin, also in Madison.

From acknowledgements given with copyright, it is clear that both wrote prolifically for the popular magazines of their time—juvenile and general, and that many of these stories were later re-worked into books. The magazine citations seen so far are: *The Nicholas*, *Success*, *Popular Magazine*, *People's Magazine*, *Youth's Companion*, *Forward*, *Boys' Life*, *Woman's Home Companion* (!), *Lippincott's Magazine*, *Top Notch* and *American Boy*.

NOTE

Dover Publications, 180 Varick St., New York, N. Y. will publish an anthology titled "Eight Dime Novels" and edited by E. F. Bleiler who pro-

vides the introduction and a thumb-nail history of the Dime Novel. This book, a paperback, is to appear in November and sell for \$3.50.

—Stanley A. Pachon

SAD NOTE

Just received word from Mrs George Sahr that her husband passed away on September 21. It was with deep sorrow that I received the news. George had visited and spent a few hours in my den looking at and talking about dime novels. George was one of the original subscribers to the *Dime Novel Roundup* way back in 1930. That is a long time. He will be sorely missed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Ed:

Just noticed my subscription is up. Can't have that, especially with the great issue just published with Ralph Smith's Merriwell and Fearnot nostalgia baseball extravaganza. Many thanx. Enclosed is my check for \$10 for 2 year subscription.

By the way, picked up a little gem at a book sale recently, perhaps you are familiar with it but it was a new one on me. "Three Rousing Cheers for the Rollo Boys" by Corey Ford. Copyright 1925 by George H. Doran Co.. 267 pages of mirth and madness. A lighthearted spoof of boys' series books and especially on *The Rover Boys*. The *Rollo Boys* are Tom, Dick and Harry and they are red blooded 100 per cent American He-Boys, and they attend Merriwell Hall.

Your obedient servant,

Dave Kanarr, Bellingham, Wash.

WANTED

Merriwell stories in Medal and New Medal Libraries. Condition good or better. Will buy individual titles or full set. Also want hard cover Merriwells, all publishers and all color covers.

F. C. Acker

3356 Nahattan Way
Las Vegas, Nevada 89109

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

- 378 Vernon Lay, 52 Oakleigh Gardens, Whetstone, London, England N20 9AB
(New member)
- 379 James W. Froehlig, 2423 Upton Ave., No. Minneapolis, Minn. 55411
(New member)
- 78 Harry K. Hudson, 3300 San Bernadino St., Clearwater, Fla. 33515
(Change of address)
- 335 Christian K. Messenger, Dept. of English, Wittenberg Univ., Springfield, Ohio 45501 (New address)
- 380 The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, East Washington Sq., Philadelphia, Pa. 19106 (New member)
- 381 Robert Richshafer, 813 Vine St., Cincinnati, Ohio 45202 (New member)
382. Thomas E. McElhone, 603 Newport Gap Pike, Wilmington, Del. 19804
(New member)
191. Judson Berry, Box 81E RR3, Sioux Falls, S. Dak. 57101 (New address)

Back numbers Reckless Ralph's Dime Novel Roundup (quite a few reprints, can't be helped). Don't have the complete set of No. 1 to 237 inclusive, but almost, lacking only a few numbers. 10c each or \$21.00 postpaid. Have at least 230 numbers or more. Also two indexes, 1 Pioneer and Scouts of the Old West, Birthday number. War Library list and Dime Novel Catalog.

Ralph F. Cummings

161 Pleasant St., So. Grafton, Mass.
01560

FOR SALE

Merriwell stories in Tip Top Weekly. Early and late numbers. Send want list; too many to catalog. Good condition and reasonable prices. Also WANTED: in nice condition, Nick Carter stories in Magnet and New Magnet Library and Merriwell stories in Medal and New Medal Library and Merriwell series.

GUINON

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Bob Dawson

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